

In addition, several additional preferred features of the invention have been added in new claims. These include the arranging of the chambers one after another in a horizontal direction of the fluidized bed to provide different process air streams sequentially to the fluidizing space (claim 5), which is supported by the figure of drawings and page 4, lines 23-28, for example; supplying the starting material at one end of the fluidizing space and discharging the granulates or agglomerates of homogenous composition from an opposite end of the fluidizing space, such that the different process steps are performed sequentially in the horizontal direction (claim 6), which is supported by the figure of drawings and at page 5, lines 1-5 and page 6, lines 22-24, for example; providing the additional components in step (d) from above the fluidizing space (claim 12), which is supported by the figure of drawings and by page 6, lines 3-8 and page 8, lines 2-3, for example; the air distribution plate separating the fluidizing space from the chambers in the air inflow area (claim 16), which is supported by the figure of drawings and at page 5, lines 5-10, for example; and the different process air streams exiting the fluidized bed as one exhaust gas stream (claim 17), which is supported at page 8, lines 14-15, for example.

Accordingly, all of the new claims are supported by the original claims and/or the specification and figure of drawings. Therefore, no new matter has been added, and entry of the new claims is respectfully requested.

The Examiner has again rejected claims 1-3 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 5,516,447 of Bauer, et al. in view of U.S. Patent No. 4,734,290 of Meyer for the reasons set forth in the previous Office Action. In addition, the Examiner has rejected claims 1-3 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as anticipated by, or alternatively under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as obvious over, U.S. Patent No. 5,814,501 of Becker, et al. The rejection over Bauer, et al. in view of Meyer is again respectfully but strenuously traversed for the same reasons as in the Request for Reconsideration filed June 27, 2002. In any event, both rejections of claims 1-3 are moot in view of their cancellation. To the extent that either or both of these rejections may be applied to any of the new claims 4-21, such rejection would be improper for the reasons set forth below, and reconsideration is therefore respectfully requested.

The Examiner again focuses on the expansion zone and step (f) of the claimed invention, while essentially ignoring most of the other process steps in manufacturing the granulated or agglomerated product. Again, it is submitted that this is improper, because the use of an expansion zone is only one step in the overall claimed process.

Applicants acknowledge that it is generally known in the prior art to treat various types of materials in a fluidized bed. In such processes, the material is converted in the fluidized bed into a granulate, for example by spraying a solid-containing liquid and subsequently drying. This basic process, which is known *per se*, is used for various materials, as set forth also in the prior art references cited by the Examiner. Thus, Bauer, et al. teach the conversion of liquid surfactant compounds into dust-free granules; Meyer teaches the manufacture of salt; Becker, et al. teach the manufacture of enzyme particles; Good, et al. (U.S. Patent No. 4,689,297) teach the manufacture of enzymes; and Glatt, et al. (U.S. Reissue Patent 32,307 of the assignee of the present application) teaches the details of the fluidized bed apparatus used in these processes.

In each of the prior art patents, the respective specific examples note that the corresponding process is carried out with an apparatus of Glatt GmbH, the assignee of the present application, or one of its related companies. See, for example, Bauer, et al. (examples, col. 8, line 65); Meyer (col. 5, line 6); Becker (in examples 3, 4, 8, 9, and 10); Good (examples 1-5); and Glatt (which is from the applicant itself). However, the apparatuses of the prior art are fluidized bed devices which work essentially in batch feed operation. That is, in these apparatuses, only one respective process (such as heating, agglomeration, drying, coating or cooling) can take place at the same time.

In contrast, a novel and essential feature of the present invention is that with the fluidized bed process known *per se*, all of these process steps can be carried out in one apparatus one after another and following sequentially at the same time. The process is described, for example, in the present specification in connection with the manufacture of detergents. In the described process, a supply of powdered starting material is introduced at one end of a fluidized bed which preferably extends longitudinally in the horizontal direction, and the finished material is discharged from the opposite end (see region II of the drawing). The material flows through the apparatus in region II above the different air inflow chambers 10 in region I. During this flow through, the solid material can be subjected to different process steps, such as heating, agglomeration, drying, coating, cooling, etc.

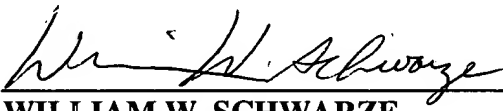
What is particularly novel and unobvious in the presently claimed invention is that different processes and process conditions can be carried out on the powdered starting material one after another in a single apparatus. Thus, by the chamber-like division of the air inflow region I into air chambers 10, the process conditions in the sections of the fluidized bed

(fluidizing space II) which lie over the chambers can be influenced and adjusted in a very directed manner, so that optimal parameters such as air speed, temperature, dosing arrangement, etc., can be adjusted for different processes. Thus, according to the present invention, various processes can be carried out one after another in one apparatus, so that an economic advantage is achieved. Of course, it will be understood by one skilled in the art that the claimed process can be used for similar processes to the one specifically described in the present application as an example.

In sum, while all of the prior art references cited by the Examiner use apparatuses of applicant and its related companies, none of the references teaches or suggests the use of different process air streams provided to the fluidized space by two or more chambers in an inflow area beneath the fluidizing space. Accordingly, for this reason alone, as well as other reasons set forth in responses to prior Office Actions, the presently claimed invention is patentably distinguishable over the prior art. Reconsideration and an early Notice of Allowance are respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,
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